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ABSTRACT

Present day ethnic and/or folk dances grew from the remnants of primitive dances. A definition of folk dance is that it is the dance of the common people of a specific region of the world, which becomes ethnic when the dance is presented by the members of the ethnic race from where the dance originates. Within every folk dance is contained the history, pyschology, and culture of a race of people. In order to execute a dance in its proper perspective, many facets must be studied, e.g., geography, customs, and clothing of the region of origin. Dances also tend to reflect the people's economic, political, and home situation. The Mexican Folk Dance reflects the history and cultural attitudes of the Mexican people. Through this medium, they express their inner-self. The totality of the Mexican's history and culture created the basis upon which the Mexican Mestizo Folk Dance was built. In order to understand the nature of dance, one must be aware of the cultures that created the Mexican Mestizo dance, e.g., the Pre-Columbian Indians, Spaniards, and the Church. Then it becomes very obvious that this dance form is not only violent in character, but it is also very masculine. (NQA)

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THE MASCULINE MEXICAN FOLK DANCE

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This article is in reply to an article by Jeanette L. Goodwin, titled "José Limon." The article appeared in the May, 1974 issue of the "Journal of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation." In the article the author states that José Limon "saw no future in these 'feminine' dances," referring to the Mexican dance form. The purpose of the following article is to bring about a realization of what is truly represented by the Mexican folk dance. Mexican folk dance is all but feminine and it would seem only reasonable that a dancer would be more careful before making a sweeping generalization that is clearly of a derogatory nature and can only be harmful to a highly respectable genre of dance.

RC 013776

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Introduction

In the study of art, the knowledge of the history and culture surrounding it is necessary. Through this knowledge the analyst learns the reasoning behind the art. The art of dance is a very common and human means of expression. Man has been dancing since his very beginning. The primitive peoples of the world all danced. Although dance was first employed for religious purposes, it was a basic part of life for primitive man.

According to Agnes De Mille, there were basically six classifications in primitive dance. They were (1) health and destruction dances, (2) fertility and courtship dances, (3) war and hunting dances, (4) death and rebirth dances, (5) peace and play dances, and (6) dances for entertainment.[1]

From the remnants of primitive dances grew the present day Ethnic and/or Folk Dances.

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[1]Agnes De Mille, The Book of Dance, Western Publishing Co., 1963, pp. 23-28.

Ethnic Dance And/Or Folk Dance

In referring to folk dance, a semantic distinction must be made between ethnic dance and folk dance. This particular terminology has caused much controversy for the lexicon of folk dancers. Basically, there are two definitions that are prevalent today.

One definition states that ethnic dance is that dance which carries or has religious overtones and connotations. Whereas, folk dance is all other dance that originates from the common people and is danced by them for recreational and enjoyment purposes.

The definition employed in this article is that of Vyts Beliajus, who says:

> Folk Dance is the dance of the common people of a specific region of the world, but it becomes ethnic when the dance is presented by the members of the ethnic race from where the dance originates.[2]

For example, a person of Spanish or Mexican heritage who presents the folk dances of Spain or Mexico is presenting ethnic folk dances. Whereas, if that same person dances the schuhplattler of the Bavarians, then he is dancing a folk dance.

Also, there are folk dancers who specialize in the dances of a particular ethnic group, but these groups are referred to as "ethnically oriented" folk dancers, and not as ethnic folk dancers. Therefore,

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[2]Vyts Beliajus, Interview, 1974.

these people would be dancing a folk dance even though all of their dances are ethnically oriented.

Folklorists feel that folk dance is one of the purest forms of culture preservation that exists. Within every folk dance is contained the history, psychology, and culture of a race of people. We can see this in the nature of the dances as we take a look at some of the differing styles of folk dance. For example, from Northern Spain comes the vigorous jota. This dance style employs jumps, leaps, and runs that would be impossible in an enclosed or confined area. Therefore, the observer can reasonably assume that the Spaniard of Northern Spain has a lot of space in which to work and that it is usually a constant factor in his daily life.

On the other hand, some dances of the Far East and some parts of Europe are danced in a sitting or kneeling position. The reason for this is because the dancer must work in a very limited space without the room for leaps and high energy locomotor movements. The emphasis of these dances is on the hands, eyes, and head, with very little importance given to the legs or feet.

From every aspect of the dance, one can learn about the people, and in order to execute a dance in its proper perspective the many facets must be studied. Some of these facets include geography, customs, and clothing of the region from which the dance originated.

For example, it would be highly impractical for the Basque, who lives in the mountainous regions of Northern Spain, to wear the ruffled dresses of the Gypsies of the plains of Southern Spain. On the other hand, the Gypsy would be too hot in the leggings of the Northern Spaniard, who must be dressed for rugged mountain life.

Dance also reflects man's psychology. This is seen in that the dances of a people tend to reflect the economic, political, and home situation; in total, the environment of man. For example, during the Great Plagues in Europe, masses of people danced just to avoid the dreaded diseases. During this epoch in man's history, great pilgrimages to a shrine or sacred place were dominating the scene in Europe.

According to Curt Sachs, author of the World History of Dance, these masses were:

> harried by plague, long wars, and endless misfortunes, and stirred to the depths of their being. Hosts of distracted people rolled westwards from place to place. Singly or hand in hand they circled and jumped in hideously distorted choral dances--for hours at a time, until they collapsed foaming at the mouth. And wherever they raved, the hysterical psychosis laid hold on the spectators, so that, quivering and grimacing, they entered the circle and under a fearful compulsion joined in the dance. The evil lasted for months; physicians and priests were powerless. And it continually flared up anew. In the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries new eruptions occurred, and there were reoccurrences far into the Seventeenth Century.[3]

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[3]Curt Sachs, World History of Dance, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1963, pp. 253-254.

From this time in history we get the St. Vitus Dance and the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, which are examples of this maniac drive to dance. There are numerous examples of how the history and culture of a people have influenced dance. These examples are only a few of many to which reference can be made.

In the same way that the history and culture greatly effected the dance of Europe, the dance of Mexico was also greatly influenced by its particular background. The Mexican Folk Dance reflects the history and cultural attitudes of its people. Through this medium, the Mexican expresses his inner-self. The totality of philosophy and culture of the people is created by their history. Man represents the sum total of his past, in both his genetic past, as well as, that of his environment. Every man is, therefore, the past striving to become the present which strives for the future. In totality, this is man's history and culture.

The history and culture of Mexico are perfectly represented by the Mexican Folk Dance. Therefore, to be able to fully understand the Mexican Folk Dance, the history and culture of Mexico must be studied.

The Creation of the Mexican Mestizo Dance Form

The Mestizo and his Background

The Mestizo Mexican man and his background represent a very complex past. The word mestizo means mixture. There is definitely a very hybrid mixture in the Mexican man of Mestizo heritage.

Pre-Columbian Mexico

The Pre-Columbian Indians of Mexico have their beginnings dated as early as 10,000 B.C. Pre-Columbian refers to the time before Columbus reached the New World. The major Pre-Columbian groups number approximately thirteen. They were:

Tepexpan Man
Chalco Culture Man
La Perra Culture Man
Nomad Tribes
Maya Indians
Tarascan Indians
Huaxteca Indians
Teotihuacan Indians
Toltec Indians
Chichimeca Indians
Zapotec Indians
Mexica Indians (who later became known as the Aztec Indians)[1]

The Mexica Indians, who are more commonly known as the Aztec Indians, had a very complex civilization and high

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[1]Frederick Peterson, Ancient Mexico, Capricorn Books, New York, 1962.

degree of culture. This was not totally due to their vast knowledge and ability at invention, but it was due to the contributions of their predecessors. For example, briefly looking at some of the technical achievements of the Pre-Columbian culture, we find that they had:

> hoes for digging,
> gardens constructed over lakes,
> armour padded with cotton,
> pyrite mirrors,
> copper tubes to drill stones,
> textiles adorned with rabbit fur,
> sandals with heels,
> stucco floors,
> picture books,
> historical chronicles,
> steambaths,
> ritual use of paper and rubber,
> et cetera.[2]

This small list is only a sample of the achievements and conveniences in the culture of the Indians of Mexico.

The zero is also an invaluable contribution of the Pre-Columbian Indians to the field of mathematics.

> Some authorities believe the Maya invented it, but recent Carbon 14 tests seem to place its origin in the time of the Olmecs. At any rate, the mathematical concept of zero was formed in Mesoamerica centuries earlier than in India, and much earlier than in Western Europe.[3]

Technology was abundant and so were the arts. In philosophy the Aztecs had reached about the same level of sophistication as had the Spaniards. The following

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[2]Peterson, op.cit., pp. 27-28.

[3]Ibid, p. 182.

is from a poem by Nezahualcóyotl entitled "Ma zan moquetzacan."

Ah nican tochan, ah nican tinemizque, tonyaz ye yuhcan.[4]	[Our house isn't here, we will not live here, everyone here, in the same manner, will have to leave this earth.][4]

The Aztec man had philosophies which were similar in character to the Spaniard of the Golden Age. This greatly facilitated the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

Spain

During the time of the conquest of Mexico, Spain had recently become a unified nation. Spain became unified under the reign of King Fernando of Aragón and Queen Isabela of Castilla. The Moors, who had occupied Spain from the year 711, were expelled from their last fortresshold of Granada in 1492. Also, in the year 1492, the first Spanish grammar was written by Nebrija in Toleda, Spain. Spanish developed from Latín Vulgar,[5] sometimes known as Proto-Romance.

Spain was at the beginning of her Golden Age. As a nation she was moving out of the Dark Middle Ages and into the Renaissance and Baroque epochs. The philosophy of the Spaniard at the time is well stated in the following passage:

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[4]Miguel León-Portilla, "Nezahualcóyotl," Trece poetas del mundo Azteca, translated by L. A. Trujillo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967, p. 62.

[5]Latín Vulgar: common la[illegible]

El hombre al nacer va a morir, no hay alegría pura.[6]

[From the moment of birth, man is going to die. Therefore, there is no pure happiness.][6]

The life man leads on earth is held in considerable contempt. While it is true that Christ's incarnation sanctified the world of time, it remains nevertheless an unreal place to which man is exiled for a time from the real world of eternity. Reality thus exists before birth and after death.[7]

Este mundo es el camino para el otro . . .[8]

[This world is the road leading to the other world.][8]

Through the study of the literature of the Pre-Columbian Indian and the literature of the Spaniards of the same epoch, a great similarity is found. The poem of Nezahualcóyotl (c.f. page 9) expresses the same philosophy as does the poem of Jorge Manrique. There are many similarities like this cited example.

The relationship of literature to history and dance is vital to a study of this nature.

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[6]Dr. Edith Rogers, "La literatura de España del Siglo de Oro," Lecture, translation by L.A. Trujillo, Denver Colorado, 1971.

[7]Bruce W. Wardropper, "The Nature of the Drama of the Golden Age," Teatro Español del Siglo de Oro, Schribner's Sons, New York, 1970, p. 5.

[8]Jorge Manrique, "Coplas por la muerte de su padre," The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse. edited by J. M. Cohen, translation by L. A. Trujillo, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1970 p. 42

De una manera u otra la novela nos presenta una visión ó interpretación del mundo y refleja la vida y los conflictos del hombre que lo habita.[9]	[In one way or another, the novel (literature) presents us with a vision or interpretation of the world and reflects the life and the conflicts of man who inhabits it.][9]

Therefore, through the use of literature, i.e. culture, we can truly relate to and understand the history of a people. Also, in understanding the culture and history, the dancer will be able to grasp the true essence of a dance that evolves from this origin.

The Spaniard, like the Pre-Columbian Indian, has a multi-cultural background. The Spaniard's heritage consists of the following cultural groups:

Celt-Iberians
Iberians
Greeks
Phoenicians
Cartheginians
Romans
Jews
Visigoths
Moors
Arabs[10]

Mestizo Mexican Man

The synthesis of the heritage of the Pre-Columbian Indian plus the heritage of the Spaniard gives mankind

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[9]Robert Lado, et.al., "La novela y la vida," Tesoro Hispánico, translation by L. A. Trujillo, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1968, p. 77.

[10]Francisco Ugarte, "Historia de España," España y su civilización, Segunda edición, The Odyssey press, Inc. New York, 1965, pp. 15-25.

the genetic past of the Mestizo. This past represents a history of peoples who were continually at war to conquer and to be conquered. Following this very same pattern, the Mestizo man is a creation of a conqueror and the conquered.

The birth of the Mestizo race is symbolized by the birth of a child of Cortez and Malinche. During Cortez's conquest of Mexico, there was a definite language barrier and this barrier was soon resolved by a woman named Malinche. Malinche was the Indian name of the woman who collaborated with the Spaniards upon their arrival to Mexico. She was among a group of twenty women given to Cortez as a gift.

> These ladies were promptly baptized and distributed among the captains. One of them turned out to be the daughter of a Mexican (Nahua)[11] notable who had been traded into servitude among the Mayans. Being of a different class from the others, she was distinguished with the title 'Doña,' tacked on to her baptismal name, Marina.[12]

Her baptized name was, therefore, Doña Marina.

"Doña" is a term in Spanish to indicate respect. Eventually, she became the interpreter for Cortez with the Indians of the Valley of Mexico. For the most part, these Indians spoke Nahuatl, which was also the language of the Aztecs.

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[11]Nahua: The name given to the Indians who spoke the language, Nahuatl, i.e., the language of the Aztec Indians.

[12]Sir Nicolas Cheetham, "The Conquest," A Short History of Mexico, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1972, p. 63.

Malinche remained with the Spaniards and cooperated with them. She and Cortez soon had a child of Spanish and Indian heritage. Many philosophers have theorized upon the results of this birth. It has become the symbol of the birth of the Mestizo Mexican race. Octavio Paz refers to this as a violation. He feels that the child's conception was not only a violation of the woman, but also of her noble race.

Doña Marina has been regarded as a traitoress and her name has evolved into a word of very negative connotation. While she was with Cortez, she would report to him what she heard from the Indian people, such as their plans for attack and warfare. This brought about a definite weakening of the opposing forces.

The Mestizo man was born and was the synthesis of two noble races who were both in a Golden Age. The conquest of Mexico was completed by the Spaniards in August of 1521. The Spaniards were the conquerors, and as in all cases of conquest, the conqueror superimposes his customs, mores, and will upon the conquered people. This is exactly what happened to the Indians of Mexico. They became the lowest member in the strata of society in Mexico. Society placed the direct immigrant of Spain at the supreme top of the social scale and it continued as follows: secondly, the Creole, i.e., the children of the immigrant Spaniard; thirdly, the Mestizo, i.e. the mixture of Spanish and Indian blood; and

finally, the pure blood Indian.

Both the cruelty of the Inquisition and the mistreatment of the Indians are part of the history that left an indelible mark of hatred for the Spaniard on the spirit of the Mexican man. This disgust for the Spaniard exists even today. It can be seen in the Mexican Constitution of 1949, whereby Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec Emperor, is identified as the national heroic symbol of Mexican nationality. There is a definite preference to recognize the indigenous ancestry as compared to the Spanish. This is so strongly felt that one can find statues of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico, but there are none of Cortez.[13]

Because of the unification of Spain in 1492 under Fernando and Isabela, who were known as los reyes católicos,[14] the national religion of Spain became Catholicism. It was then required that all people of Spain become Catholics or leave the country. The Spaniards required the same for México.

This doctrine greatly influenced the Mestizo Mexican man. Basically, it allowed the Catholic Church

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[13]José E. Iturriaga, "The Character of the Mexican," The Modern Mexican Essay, edited by José Luís Martínez, translated by H. H. Hilborn, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada, 1968, pp. 474-475.

[14]Los reyes católicos: the Catholic kings

to be the major influence of the Mestizo man.

Most all educational institutions were operated by the Church. The Church reigned supreme over education, society, and even public opinion. The Spanish doctrine plus the Inquisition thoroughly controlled all forms of expression of the people in Spain's new territory.

The Church is one of the best examples of the imposition of culture and will upon the conquered people. The Pre-Columbian Indians already believed in one superior god, and they ate and drank the body and blood of their god. Their form of celebration was somewhat more vivid in that they sacrificed a privileged individual, who upon sacrifice became one with the god. At the sacrificial altar, the high priest would then tear out the heart of the victim and offering it up to the god, eat of its body and blood. In the ceremony of the Catholic Church, the same is done symbolically on a less dramatic scale.

The Cathedral of Mexico City now stands on the same site where once existed one of the sacred temples of the Aztec Indians. Moreover, the Virgin of Guadalupe coincidentally appeared on the hill of Tepeyac where the Aztec goddess of earth and corn, known as Tonantzin, had her shrine.

In essence, the Church Indianized itself and superimposed itself on the Indian Culture in order to

gain control. Just as the Church controlled the religious life, the Church also took on the major role in the field of education. Soon the Indians were all speaking Spanish, and those who did not assimilate were tortured and killed by the Inquisition or they left civilization to become hermetic people in the mountains of Mexico. Therefore, from these few examples, we can see how the Indian culture was being supressed and subdued, and how the Indians were expected to assimilate.

The culture of Spain was superimposed and done so in a very professional manner. This was possible because Spain had just reconquered her own lands of the Iberic Peninsula, and the people of Spain were experienced in the tactics of conquest and acculturalization.

Because of European control of Mexico, the people of Mexico immediately began what Samuel Ramos, a Mexican philosopher, has referred to as Mexican Mimeticism. "Throughout [Mexican] history, Mexico has fed on European traditions and expressed much interest and appreciation for their values."[15] According to Ramos, the imitation process of the Mexican man was due to his underlying fear of inferiority. This inferiority complex was caused by a total subjugation to the point

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[15]Samuel Ramos, "Imitation of Europe in the Nineteenth Century," Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico, translated by Peter G. Earle, University of Texas Press, Texas, 1962, p. 17.

of negation of the Mestizo and Indian people of Mexico. All indigenous characteristics were considered as uncultured and treated as socially unacceptable.

Octavio Paz, a Mexican Philosopher, states:

> The character of the Mexican is a product of the social circumstances that prevail in our country and the history of Mexico, which is the history of these circumstances, contains the answer to every question. The situation that prevailed during the colonial period would thus be the source of our closed, unstable attitude. Our history as an independent nation would contribute to perpetuating and strengthening this servant psychology, for we have not succeeded in overcoming the misery of the common people and our exasperating social differences, despite a century and a half of struggle and constitutional experience. The use of violence as a dialectal resource, the abuse of authority by the powerful (a vice that has not disappeared) and, finally, the scepticism and resignation of the people--all of these more visible today than ever before, due to our successive post-revolution disillusionments--would complete the historical explication."[16]

There are many arguments relating to the synthesis that created the Mestizo race. Many authors, like Octavio Paz, feel that the great noble Indian race was raped by the Spaniards. Although, on the other hand, there are those, like José Vasconcelos, who postulate the advantage of the synthesis. Vasconcelos, in his book, La Raza Cósmica, points out that the most hybrid race was created by the Mestizo synthesis. He makes a point of stating that the Spaniards helped the Pre-Columbian world and that the conquest was to the

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[16]Octavio Paz, "The Sons of Malinche," The Labyrinth of Solitude, translated by Lysander Kemp, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1961, p. 71.

advantage of all the world.[17]

It is not for this author to argue the postulations of these men, but to present their ideologies so as to give the folklorist a total view of the history and culture that conceived and bore the Mestizo culture. The totality of this history and culture created the basis upon which the Mexican Mestizo folk dance was built. Histories, philosophies, and cultures can be distorted by historians, philosophers, or folklorists, but the movement vocabulary of a people can never be distorted. Every man is a living history of his past. The peon crouches, the explorer and priest stand erect, as each man portrays his psychological and genetic past in his movement vocabulary. In truly understanding the nature of movement, i.e., dance, and being aware of the cultures that created the Mexican Mestizo dance, it becomes very obvious that this dance form is not only violent in character, but it is also very masculine.

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[17]José Vasconcelos, "Breve historia de México," An Anthology of Spanish American Literature, second edition, prepared by John Englekirk, et.al., Appleton-Century-Crofts, Meredith Corp, New York, 1968, pp. 667-671.

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